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December 22, 2010

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The U.S. commission on International Freedom (USCIRF) today welcomed the continued decline in support in the UN General Assembly for this year's "defamation of religions" resolution. The vote Tuesday was 79 yes, 67 no, and 40 abstentions, down from 80-61-42 in December of last year.

"Each year, more and more countries are recognizing that laws allegedly protecting religions from 'defamation' or criticism actually increase intolerance and human rights violations, instead of reducing these problems," said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. "This resolution seeks to divide the international community, rather than building consensus on ways to promote fundamental freedoms. Religious intolerance is best fought through efforts to encourage respect for every individual's human rights, not through national or international anti-blasphemy laws."

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) has sponsored annual "defamation of religions" resolutions in the General Assembly since 2005 and the UN Human Rights Council or its predecessor since 1999. Both bodies continue to adopt these resolutions, but since March 2008 the votes in favor have decreased from a majority to a plurality of members. "This is now the sixth consecutive time since 2008—three times in the Council and three times in the General Assembly—that more UN members have opposed and abstained on 'defamation of religions' resolutions than have supported them," said Mr. Leo.

USCIRF urged the State Department to intensify its efforts in opposition to this resolution in advance of the expected next consideration of the issue at the Human Rights Council in March.

"The Commission commends Members of the House of Representatives, led by Reps. Elliot Engel (D-NY) and Christopher Smith (R-NJ), for their decisive work expressing concern about these flawed resolutions with many foreign leaders," said Mr. Leo.

For more information on this issue, see USCIRF's recently updated Policy Focus [\*The Dangerous Idea of Protecting Religions from 'Defamation'; A Threat to Universal\*](#)

*Human Rights Standards.*

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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